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Agriculture  
Service

# Summertime Food Safety

Keep Food Hot—Cold—Clean

34  
Revised  
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# Summertime Food Safety

Keep Food Hot—Cold—Clean

**S**ummertime often brings out the cook. Juicy grilled meat and chicken, sunshine, and fresh air—that's a hard combination to beat. Unfortunately, summertime sometimes brings out something less pleasant too . . . food poisoning!

In making the switch from kitchen to patio, park, or beach, some people don't carry along all the good food-handling habits they should. To keep your outing from turning into something else, learn to take proper care of foods, especially meat and poultry products, from the time you buy them to the time you bring leftovers home.

Here are answers to some common questions about getting ready for a picnic.

**Q** How should I shop for meat and poultry, from a food safety standpoint?

**A** Pick up meat and poultry products last at the market. Have them bagged with other cold foods and get them home and into the refrigerator or freezer promptly. Don't leave meat and poultry in the car while you do other errands. They get warm and germs on them can multiply to dangerous levels.

**Q** What's the best way to store meat and poultry?

**A** If you are going to use the products within a few days, they may be stored in the refrigerator in the plastic wrap, as purchased. Or you may remove the store packaging and loosely rewrap the product in wax paper, plastic film, or aluminum foil. For longer storage, freeze the products. Wrap them tightly in moisture-resistant material such as aluminum foil, plastic film, or freezer wrap. Keep refrigerator temperature at 35° to 40° F (2° to 4° C) and freezer temperature at 0° F (-18° C) or below.

**Q** Is there any special way to thaw frozen meat and poultry?



**A** Thaw meat and poultry products, wrapped, in the refrigerator. For a quicker method, thaw them in watertight wrapping under cold water. They also may be defrosted at room temperature in a tightly closed, double bag. Cook meat and poultry promptly after thawing.



**Q** What precautions should I take in preparing food for a barbecue or picnic? 7/63

**A** Be just as careful in preparing food for outdoor cooking as you would for indoor cooking. Wash all kitchen work surfaces and utensils with soap and hot water—including countertops, wood cutting boards, and knives—before and after using them for raw meat or poultry. Never place cooked, ready-to-serve meat or poultry on a surface or in a container used for the raw product without first thoroughly washing the surface or container. If possible, use separate cutting boards for raw and cooked products to avoid “cross contamination.” Wash hands before and after touching raw meat or poultry. Disposable washcloths, plates, and utensils are convenient for outdoor use.



**Q** What's the safe way to hold foods on a picnic?

**A** Pack your perishable foods—including hotdogs and lunch meats—in a well-insulated cooler with plenty of ice to keep them cold. Do not open the cooler unnecessarily. Leave it in a shady spot to help keep the ice from melting too fast.

**Q** What about taking canned meat and poultry products to a picnic?

**A** Canned products are fine but should be eaten immediately after opening. If the food looks or smells suspicious or if liquid spurts when the container is opened, *don't use or even taste the food*. Do not use foods from cans that are leaking, bulging, or severely dented or from jars that are cracked or have loose or bulging lids.



**Q** What about leftovers?

**A** Once you're through eating, put leftovers into the cooler right away. Be sure there's enough ice in the cooler to keep leftovers cold and safe until you get home.



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**Q** How can I recognize food poisoning?

**A** The effects of food poisoning are much like those of the flu . . . they are often mistaken for each other. Headache, diarrhea, vomiting, abdominal cramps, and fever are some of the telltale signs, but they may not appear until many hours after eating. If you have these symptoms and they don't go away in a day or so, see your doctor.

The best thing, however, is to prevent food poisoning. Begin when you buy the food for your outing.

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### Other Food Safety Publications (English and Spanish)

- Food Safety for the Family
- Holiday Food Safety
- Safe Brown Bag Lunches
- How to Fight the Food Spoilers (mini-poster)

For a free copy, write to: FSIS Information, Room 3606-S, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

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